

HOUSE BILL REPORT

SSB 5035

As Passed House:

March 30, 2009

Title: An act relating to improving veterans' access to services.

Brief Description: Improving veterans' access to services.

Sponsors: Senate Committee on Government Operations & Elections (originally sponsored by Senators Hobbs, Swecker, Marr, Roach, Kastama, Kauffman, Kilmer, Hatfield, McAuliffe and Haugen; by request of Joint Committee on Veterans' and Military Affairs).

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

State Government & Tribal Affairs: 3/24/09 [DP].

Floor Activity

Passed House: 3/30/09, 97-0.

Brief Summary of Substitute Bill

- Requires the Department of Veterans Affairs to study ways to increase veterans' access to state and federal assistance programs.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON STATE GOVERNMENT & TRIBAL AFFAIRS

Majority Report: Do pass. Signed by 6 members: Representatives Hunt, Chair; Armstrong, Ranking Minority Member; Alexander, Flannigan, Hurst and Miloscia.

Staff: Marsha Reilly (786-7135)

Background:

The Department of Veterans Affairs (DVA) was created in 1975 and provides many services to veterans and their families, including medical care, assistance with claims for benefits, estate management, counseling, and financial assistance. The DVA also assists veterans with education, training, and employment.

Summary of Bill:

This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not a part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.

The DVA must study ways to increase its access to veterans and to increase veterans' access to state and federal assistance programs. By January 1, 2010, the DVA must submit a report to the Legislature that addresses the following:

- how to achieve the goal of identifying all veterans in the state within five years;
- how to efficiently identify veterans as their population grows;
- how to identify veterans through referrals from other state agencies;
- how to effectively inform veterans of state and federal programs;
- the potential costs and savings to the state if the DVA's recommendations were undertaken; and
- legislation needed to implement the DVA's recommendations.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Effective Date: The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of the session in which the bill is passed.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony:

(In support) This is the third year this bill has been introduced. The Department of Veterans' Affairs (DVA) takes veterans from state assistance and puts them on federal assistance. The federal government should take care of these people. The DVA supports the bill. Partnerships are important when resources are thin. It is important to have agencies communicate regarding identification of persons who may be eligible for federal veterans' assistance programs. The DVA has worked with the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) to move veterans to federal services, saving the DSHS about \$6 million. Federal benefits are applied first, and then state benefits. Veterans, as well as the surviving spouses of veterans, are eligible for federal benefits. The Veterans Legislative Coalition is supportive of the bill.

(Opposed) None.

Persons Testifying: Senator Hobbs, prime sponsor; Alfie Alvurado, Washington State Department of Veterans Affairs; and Tim Wicorek, Veterans Legislative Coalition.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.